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What Does the Significance of the Twelve Gates and Twelve Foundations of the New Jerusalem Reveal?

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In the book of Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem is vividly portrayed as a radiant city descending from heaven onto a revitalized Earth. This heavenly city is adorned with God's glory and is built with high walls featuring twelve gates, each attended by an angel (Verse 11-12). Intriguingly, each gate is carved with the name of a tribe of Israel, and each is made from a single, enormous pearl (Verse 21). These gates will always remain open (Verse 25).

The significance of these twelve gates lies in their connection to the Old Testament. God promised Abraham that he would father a large nation, inherit a prosperous land, and his descendants would bless all nations (Genesis 12:1–3). From Abraham descended Jacob, renamed as "Israel" by God (Genesis 32:28), who had twelve sons. These sons founded the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 49), which later became God's chosen people, inherited the Promised Land (Exodus 6:14; 24:4), and received God's Law (Exodus 20) and were chosen by God to be His covenant people (Exodus 19:5–6). The gates named after these tribes symbolize the Old Testament saints.

During David's reign, Jerusalem, located in Judah's territory, was chosen as the city of God's name (2 Chronicles 12:13). The New Jerusalem, as described in Revelation, is prepared for the Lamb's reign (Revelation 21:1–3). This heavenly city is built on twelve foundations, representing the twelve apostles who will govern Israel's twelve tribes (verse 14; cf. Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30). This symbolizes New Testament believers and the Church's foundation.

The gates of the New Jerusalem, three on each side (Revelation 21:13), bear the names of Israel's tribes and are guarded by angels (Revelation 21:12). These celestial guardians only allow those written in the Lamb's Book of Life to enter (verse 27). This configuration is often compared to Ezekiel's vision of the millennial kingdom city, which also has three gates on each side, each named after a tribe of Israel (Ezekiel 48:30–34). This design also reflects Numbers 2, where God commanded each side of the wilderness tabernacle to be encamped by three tribes.

From this detailed description, we understand that the twelve tribes of Israel on the New Jerusalem's gates highlight God's unchanging dedication to Israel as His chosen nation through which He would execute His plan of salvation for humanity. They were chosen to be a light to all nations, and this heritage is enshrined in the New Jerusalem. The city also honors the apostles, encapsulating both the Old and New Testaments—making the New Jerusalem a city inhabited by God's chosen from all times.

Romans 9 differentiates between physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the latter being those sharing the patriarchs' faith in God. It's essential for believers to remember that not all Gentiles will find the light.

The complex architecture of the New Jerusalem, with its twelve gates and twelve foundations, holds profound significance for believers. It reminds us of God's loyalty to His chosen people and our future destiny in God's presence. It prompts a sense of urgency and anticipation, encouraging us to prepare for the Lord's imminent return and our everlasting residence in the New Jerusalem. As the rapture's time approaches, we, as Christians, must prepare for this glorious future.

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